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TAGS: OSCE PINR PREL RS

SUBJECT: A RUSSIAN TAKE ON OSCE ELECTIONS/OTHER ISSUES

Classified By: CDA Kyle Scott, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Russian OSCE Mission DCM Vladimir Voronkov (protect) told USOSCE PolCouns March 31 to expect a "very difficult" second half of 2006 in OSCE with respect to elections observation issues. Voronkov said that while he doubts there is any written instruction, he is convinced that the MFA has been tasked by the Kremlin with ensuring that OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), especially its elections monitoring functions, will be thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the Russian public well before 2008 Russian Presidential election. He envisages either of two outcomes as the Kremlin's policy goal:

-- To build up such a substantial drumbeat of criticism of ODIHR and its practices that its observation of the Russian election will already be considered completely suspect by the Russian public before it even takes place, so as to negate any effect of a critical ODIHR report; or

-- To provide a pretext for Russia simply not to invite ODIHR observation of the election in the first place, irrespective of Russia's OSCE Copenhagen commitments.

Voronkov pointed to Russia's recent strident attacks on ODIHR's observation of the Belarus Presidential election as explicitly part of this strategy. He expressed considerable concern that Russia's campaign against ODIHR will have serious negative consequences for the atmosphere and for cooperation in OSCE in general, as the year progresses.

¶2. (C) Speaking personally on broader issues, Voronkov expressed disquiet over what he views as the complete inability of Russia's leadership to understand that Russia can gain, rather than lose, by having stable, prosperous independent states around its borders. The leadership, he said, cannot see that neighbors can be good friends without necessarily being subservient clients, and Russia will pay a price down the road for tying its fortunes to the Lukashenkos and Karimovs of the region. He lamented Russia's approach to the separatist problems in Moldova and Georgia, emphatically agreeing with PolCouns that Russia's policy is to preserve the current status quo and to foster instability in those countries. In an aside, he said that Russia's leadership seems to think it can adopt the Chinese model of development, but does not understand that Russia and China are completely different. Russia's leaders, in Voronkov's view, think that Russia is the main force in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: in reality, he said, it is China, and Russia is simply deluding itself.

¶3. (C) Finally, looking at Russia's internal situation, Voronkov described the country's leaders as the "third tier" remnants of the Soviet period, concerned almost solely with enriching themselves. "I was more optimistic a year ago," he concluded, about Russia's possibilities, but now sees most trends as being negative for the next few years, at least.

SCOTT